

Pride of lions loose in Zaka, Bikita

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Kings of the jungle ... Loose lions have avoided capture by Parks and Wildlife rangers

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by Staff
Reporter



A PRIDE of lions is causing terror in Zaka and Bikita districts after escaping from the adjoining Save Valley Conservancy, officials said on Tuesday.

The lions have so far attacked livestock, particularly in Zaka, Masvingo province, where families have been left counting the cost after losing cattle, goats and donkeys.

Save Conservancy officials blame the escape on a dilapidated 330KM electric fence surrounding the 3,200 sq km conservancy – the last line of defence for communities in neighbouring settlements.

National Parks and Wildlife rangers have been camped at Nyika Growth Point in Bikita since February 18 trying to track down the lions without success.

Bikita district administrator Edgars Seenza said the fence on the conservancy was failing at various points, leaving communities to deal with dangerous animals which roam freely into the adjoining districts of Mwenezi, Zaka, Chivi, Bikita and Masvingo.

The Save Valley Conservancy is home to some 70 lions, 800 elephants, 5,000 buffalo, 1,400 giraffes, 150 black rhinos, 50 white rhinos, 2,000 eland, 2,000 zebra, 2,000 wildebeest and nearly 400 different bird species.

Seenza said: “I went to the place and talked to the owners of the conservancy who said they could no longer afford to repair the fence as they have run out of money.

“The fence was not torn down; it is in a dilapidated state. We are trying to negotiate with owners of the conservancy so that they can repair the fence.”

Seenza said an Air Force helicopter was being used to scan thousands of square miles of landscape to track down the lions, whose exact number remains unknown.

Bikita Rural District CEO Johannes Mpamhadzi said the council was providing road transport for the Parks and Wildlife rangers who had so far failed to locate the pride, which usually strikes during the night and is gone by daybreak.

“We have been providing vehicles and fuel for the officers from the Parks and Wildlife department for the past two weeks and our budget is now being strained,” he said on Tuesday.

“The rangers have not seen any lions, and everyone is anxious that they are located very soon before humans become victims.”